

The PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

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THE MYSTERY OF THE YELLOW RACE
AND THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK
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CHAPTER XVII.

The Safety-Pin Again.

Monchamrin's last phrase so clearly expressed the suspicion in which he now held his partner that it was bound to cause a stormy explanation at the end of which it was agreed that Richard should yield to all Monchamrin's wishes, with the object of helping him to discover the miscreant who was victimizing them.

This brings us to the interval after the Grand Act, with the strange conduct observed by M. Remy and those curious lapses from the dignity that might be expected of the managers. It was arranged between Richard and Monchamrin, first, that Richard should repeat the exact movements which he had made on the night of the disappearance of the first twenty-thousand francs; and, second, that Monchamrin should not for an instant lose sight of Richard's coat-tail pocket, into which Mame Giry was to slip the twenty-thousand francs.

M. Richard went and placed himself at the identical spot where he had stood when he bowed to the under-secretary for fine arts. M. Monchamrin took up his position a few steps behind him.

Mame Giry passed, rubbed up against M. Richard, got rid of her twenty-thousand francs in the manager's coat-tail pocket and disappeared. . . . Or, rather, she was conjured away. In accordance with the instructions received from Monchamrin a few minutes earlier, Mame Giry took the good lady to the acting-manager's office and turned the key on her, thus making it impossible for her to communicate with her ghost.

Meanwhile, M. Richard was bending and bowing and scraping and walking backward, just as if he had that night and mighty minister, the under-secretary for fine arts, before him. Only, though, these marks of politeness would have created no astonishment if the under-secretary of state had really been in front of M. Richard. They caused an easily comprehensible amazement to the spectators of this very natural but quite inexplicable scene when M. Richard had nobody in front of him.

M. Richard bowed . . . to nobody; bent his back . . . to nobody; and walked backward . . . before nobody. . . . And, a few steps behind him, M. Monchamrin did the same thing that he was doing, in addition to pushing away M. Remy and begging M. de La Borderie, the ambassador and the manager of the Credit Central, "not to touch M. le directeur."

Monchamrin, who had his own ideas, did not want Richard to come to him presently, when the twenty-thousand francs were gone, and say: "Perhaps it was the ambassador or the manager of the Credit Central, or Remy."

The more so as, at the time of the first scene, as Richard himself admitted, Richard had met nobody in that part of the theater after Mame Giry had brushed up against him.

Having begun by walking backward in order to bow, Richard continued to do so from prudence, until he reached the passage leading to the offices of the management. In this way, he was constantly watched by Monchamrin from behind and himself kept an eye on any one approaching from the front. Once more, this novel method of walking behind the scenes, adopted by the managers of our National Academy of Music, attracted attention; but the managers themselves thought of nothing but their twenty-thousand francs.

On reaching the half-dark passage, Richard said to Monchamrin, in a low voice:

"I am sure that nobody has touched me. . . . You had no better keep at some distance from me and watch me till I come to the door of the office; it is better not to arouse suspicion and we can see anything that happens."

But Monchamrin replied, "No, Richard, no! You walk ahead and I'll walk immediately behind you! I won't leave you by a step!"

"But, in that case," exclaimed Richard, "they will never steal our twenty-thousand francs!"

"I should hope not, indeed!" declared Monchamrin.

"Then what we are doing is absurd!"

"We are doing exactly what we did last time. . . . Last time, I joined you as you were leaving the stage and followed close behind you down this passage."

"That's true!" sighed Richard, shaking his head and passively obeying Monchamrin.

Two minutes later, the joint managers locked themselves into their office. Monchamrin himself put the key in his pocket.

"We remained locked up like this, last time," he said, "until you left the opera to go home."

"That's so. No one came and disturbed us, I suppose?"

"No one."

"Then," said Richard, who was trying to collect his memory, "then I

must certainly have been robbed on my way home from the opera!"

"No," said Monchamrin in a drier tone than ever, "no, that's impossible. For I dropped you in my cab. The twenty-thousand francs disappeared at your place; there's not a shadow of a doubt about that."

"It's incredible!" protested Richard. "I am sure of my servants. . . . and if one of them had done it, he would have disappeared since."

Monchamrin shrugged his shoulders, as though to say that he did not wish to enter into details, and Richard began to think that Monchamrin was treating him in a very insupportable fashion.

"Monchamrin, I've had enough of this!"

"Richard, I've had too much of it!" "Do you dare to suspect me?" "Yes, of a silly joke."

"One doesn't joke with twenty-thousand francs."

"That's what I think," declared Monchamrin, unfolding a newspaper and ostentatiously studying its contents.

"What are you doing?" asked Richard. "Are you going to read the paper next?"

"Yes, Richard, until I take you home."

"Like last time?"

"Yes, like last time."

Richard snatched the paper from Monchamrin's hands. Monchamrin stood up, more irritated than ever, and found himself faced by an expectant Richard, who, crossing his arms on his chest, said:

"Look here, I'm thinking of this. I'm thinking of what I might think if, like last time, after my spending the evening alone with you, you brought me home and, at the moment of parting, I perceived that twenty-thousand francs had disappeared from my coat-pocket. . . . Like last time."

"And what might you think?" asked Monchamrin, crimson with rage.

"I might think that, as you hadn't left me by a foot's breadth and as, by your own wish, you were the only one to approach me, like last time, I might think that, if that twenty-thousand francs was no longer in my pocket, it stood a very good chance of being in yours!"

Monchamrin leaped up at the suggestion.

"Oh!" he shouted. "A safety-pin!"

"What do you want a safety-pin for?"

"To fasten you up with! . . . A safety-pin! . . . A safety-pin!"

"You want to fasten me with a safety-pin?"

"Yes, to fasten you to the twenty-thousand francs! Then, whether it's here, or on the drive from here to your place, or at your place, you will feel the hand that pulls at your pocket and you will see if it's mine! Oh, so you're suspecting me now, are you? A safety-pin!"

"And that was the moment when Monchamrin opened the door on the passage and shouted:

"A safety-pin! . . . somebody give me a safety-pin!"

"Oh!" he said, "at the same moment, Remy, who had no safety-pin, was received by Monchamrin, while a boy procured the pin so eagerly longed for. And what happened was this: Monchamrin first locked the door again. Then he knelt down behind Richard's back.

"I hope," he said, "that the notes are still there."

"So do I," said Richard.

"The real ones?" asked Monchamrin, resolved not to be "had" this time.

"Look for yourself," said Richard. "I refuse to touch them."

Monchamrin took the envelope from Richard's pocket and drew out the



"Give Me Back My Twenty-Thousand Francs!"

bank-notes with a trembling hand, for, this time, in order frequently to make sure of the presence of the notes, he had not sealed the envelope nor even fastened it. He felt reassured on finding that they were all there and quite genuine. He put them back in the tail-pocket and pinned them with great care. Then he sat down be-

hind Richard's coat-tails and kept his eyes fixed on them, while Richard, sitting at his writing-table, did not stir.

"A little patience, Richard," said Monchamrin. "We have only a few minutes to wait. . . . The clock will soon strike twelve. Last time, we left at the last stroke of twelve."

"Oh, I shall have all the patience necessary!"

The time passed, slow, heavy, mysterious, stifling. Richard tried to laugh.

"I shall end by believing in the omnipotence of the ghost," he said.

"Just now, don't you find something uncomfortable, disquieting, alarming in the atmosphere of this room?"

"You're quite right," said Monchamrin, who was really impressed.

"The ghost!" continued Richard, in a low voice, as though fearing lest he should be overheard by invisible ears. "The ghost! Suppose, all the same, it were a ghost who puts the magic envelopes on the table. . . . who talks in Box Five. . . . who hooked the chandelier. . . . and who robs us! For, after all, after all, after all, there is no one here except you and me, and, if the notes disappear and neither you nor I have anything to do with it, well, we shall have to believe in the ghost. . . . in the ghost!"

At that moment, the clock on the mantelpiece gave its warning click and the first stroke of twelve struck.

The two managers shuddered. The perspiration streamed from their foreheads. The twelfth stroke sounded strangely in their ears.

When the clock stopped, they gave a sigh and rose from their chairs.

"I think we can go now," said Monchamrin.

"I shall go," Richard agreed.

"Before we go, do you mind if I look in your pocket?"

"But, of course, Monchamrin, you must!"

"Well, I can feel the pin."

"Of course, as you said, we can't be robbed without noticing it."

But Monchamrin, whose hands were still fumbling, belatedly:

"I can feel the pin, but I can't feel the notes!"

"Come, no joking, Monchamrin! This isn't the time for it!"

"Well, feel for yourself!"

Richard tore off his coat. The two managers turned the pocket inside out. The pocket was empty.

And the curious thing was the pin remained stuck in the same place.

Richard and Monchamrin turned pale. There was no longer any doubt about the witchcraft.

"The ghost!" muttered Monchamrin.

But Richard suddenly sprang upon his partner.

"No one but you has touched my pocket! Give me back my twenty-thousand francs! . . . Give me back my twenty-thousand francs!"

"On my soul," sighed Monchamrin, who was ready to swoon, "on my soul, I swear that I haven't got it!"

Then somebody knocked at the door. Monchamrin opened it automatically, seemed hardly to recognize M. Remy, his business-manager, exchanged a few words with him, without knowing what he was saying and, with an unconscious movement, put the safety-pin, for which he had no further use, into the hands of his bewildered subordinate.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Commissary, the Viscount and the Persian.

The first words of the commissary of police, on entering the managers' office, were to ask after the missing prima donna.

"Is Christine Daae here?"

"Christine Daae here?" echoed Richard. "No. Why?"

As for Monchamrin, he had not the strength left to utter a word.

Richard repeated for the commissary and the compact crowd which had followed him into the office observed an impressive silence.

"Why do you ask if Christine Daae is here, M. le commissaire?"

"Because she has to be found," declared the commissary of police solemnly.

"What do you mean, she has to be found? Has she disappeared?"

"In the middle of the performance!"

"In the middle of the performance? This is extraordinary!"

"Isn't it? And what is quite as extraordinary is that you should first learn it from me!"

"Yes," said Richard, taking his head in his hands and muttering, "What is this new business? Oh, it's enough to make a man send in his resignation!"

And he pulled a few hairs out of his mustache without even knowing what he was doing.

"So she . . . so she disappeared in the middle of the performance?" he repeated.

"Yes, she was carried off in the Prison Act, at the moment when she was invoking the aid of the angels; but I doubt if she was carried off by an angel."

"Am I sure that she was?"

Everybody looked round. A young man, pale and trembling with excitement, repeated:

"I am sure of it!"

"Sure of what?" asked Mifroid.

"That Christine Daae was carried off by an angel, M. le commissaire, and I can tell you his name."

"Aha, M. le Vicomte de Chagny! So you maintain that Christine Daae was carried off by an angel; an angel of the opera, no doubt?"

"Yes, monsieur, by an angel of the opera; and I will tell you where he lives. . . . when we are alone."

"You are right, monsieur."

And the commissary of police, inviting Raoul to take a chair, cleared the room of all the rest, excepting the managers.

Then Raoul spoke:

"M. le commissaire, the angel is called Erik, he lives in the opera and is the Angel of Music!"

"The Angel of Music! Really! That is very curious!"

The Angel of Music! And, turning to the managers, M. Mifroid asked, "Have you an Angel of Music on the premises, gentlemen?"

Richard and Monchamrin shook their heads, without even speaking.

"Oh," said the viscount, "those gentlemen have heard of the opera ghost. Well, I am in a position to state that the opera ghost and the Angel of Music are one and the same person; and his real name is Erik."

M. Mifroid rose and looked at Raoul attentively.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur, but is it your intention to make fun of the law? And, if not, what is all this about the opera ghost?"

"I say that these gentlemen have heard of him."

"Gentlemen, it appears that you know the opera ghost?"

Richard rose, with the remaining hairs of his mustache in his hand.

"No, M. Commissary, no, we do not know him, but we wish that we did, for this very evening he has robbed us of twenty-thousand francs!"

And Richard turned a terrible look on Monchamrin, which seemed to say:

"Give me back the twenty-thousand francs, or I'll tell the whole story."

Monchamrin understood what he meant, for, with a distracted gesture, he said:

"Oh, tell everything and have done with it!"

As for Mifroid, he looked at the managers and at Raoul by turns, wondering whether he had strayed into a lunatic asylum. He passed his hand through his hair.

"A ghost," he said, "who, on the same evening, carries off an opera-singer and steals twenty-thousand francs is a ghost who must have his hands very full! If you don't mind, we will take the questions in order. The singer first, the twenty-thousand francs after. Come, M. de Chagny, let us try to talk seriously. You believe that Mlle. Christine Daae has been carried off by an individual called Erik. Do you know this person? Have you seen him?"

"Where?"

"In a churchyard."

M. Mifroid gave a start, began to scrutinize Raoul again and said:

"Of course! That's where ghosts usually hang out! . . . And what were you doing in that churchyard?"

"Monsieur," said Raoul, "I can quite understand how absurd my replies must seem to you. But I beg you to believe that I am in full possession of my faculties. The safety of the person dearest to me in the world is at stake. I should like to convince you in a few words, for time is pressing and every minute is valuable. Unfortunately, if I do not tell you the strangest story that ever was from the beginning, you will not believe me. I will tell you all I know about the opera ghost, M. Commissary. Alas, I do not know much."

"Never mind, go on, go on!" exclaimed Richard and Monchamrin, suddenly interested.

Unfortunately for their hopes of learning some detail that could put them on the track of their boaster, they were soon compelled to accept the fact that M. Raoul de Chagny had completely lost his head. All that story about Perros-Guirec, death's heads and enchanted violins, could only have taken birth in the disordered brain of a youth mad with love. It was evident, also, that M. Commissary Mifroid shared their view; and the magistrate would certainly have cut short the incoherent narrative if circumstances had not taken it upon themselves to interrupt it.

The door opened and a man entered, curiously dressed in an enormous frock-coat and a tall hat, at once shabby and shiny, that came down to his ears. He went up to the commissary and spoke to him in a whisper. It was doubtless a detective come to deliver an important communication.

During this conversation M. Mifroid did not take his eyes off Raoul. At last, addressing him, he said:

"Monsieur, we have talked enough about the ghost. We will now talk about yourself a little, if you have no objection; you were to carry off Mlle. Christine Daae tonight?"

"Yes, M. le commissaire."

"After the performance?"

"Yes, M. le commissaire."

"All your arrangements were made?"

"Yes, M. le commissaire."

"The carriage that brought you was to take you both away. . . . There were fresh horses in readiness at every stage."

"That is true, M. le commissaire."

"And nevertheless your carriage is still outside the Rotunda awaiting you, is it not?"

"Yes, M. le commissaire."

"Did you know that there were three other carriages there, in addition to yours?"

"I did not pay the least attention."

"They were the carriages of Mlle. Sorelli, which could not find room in the Cour de l'Administration; of Car-

lotta, and of your brother, M. le Comte de Chagny. . . ."

"Very likely."

"What is certain is that, though your carriage and Sorelli's and Car-

lotta's are still there, by the Rotunda pavement, M. le Comte de Chagny's carriage is gone."

"This has nothing to say to . . ."

"I beg your pardon. Was not M. le Comte opposed to your marriage with Mlle. Daae?"

"That is a matter that only concerns the family."

"You have answered my question; he was opposed to it. . . . and that was why you were carrying Christine Daae out of your brother's reach. . . . Well, M. de Chagny, allow me to inform you that your brother has been smarter than you! It is he who has carried off Christine Daae!"

"Oh, impossible!" moaned Raoul, pressing his hand to his heart. "Are you sure?"

"Immediately after the artist's disappearance, which was procured by means which we have still to ascertain, he flung into his carriage, which drove right across Paris at a furious pace."

"Across Paris?" asked poor Raoul, in a hoarse voice. "What do you mean by across Paris?"

"Across Paris and out of Paris. . . . by the Brussels road."

"Oh," cried the young man, "I shall catch them!"

And he rushed out of the office.

"And bring her back to us!" cried the commissary gaily. . . . "Ah, that's a trick worth two of the Angel of Music!"

And, turning to his audience, M. Mifroid delivered a little lecture on police methods.

"I don't know for a moment whether M. le Comte de Chagny has really carried Christine Daae off or not. . . . but I want to know and I believe that, at this moment, no one is more anxious to inform us than his brother. . . . And now he is flying in pursuit of him! He is my chief auxiliary! This, gentlemen, is the art of the police, which is believed to be so complicated and which, nevertheless, appears so simple as soon as you see that it consists in getting your work done by people who have nothing to do with the police."

But M. le Commissaire de Police Mifroid would not have been quite so satisfied with himself if he had known that the rush of his rapid emissary was stopped at the entrance to the very first corridor. A tall figure blocked Raoul's way.

"Where are you going so fast, M. de Chagny?" asked a voice.

Raoul impatiently raised his eyes and recognized the astrakhan cap of an hour ago. He stopped.



"You, Who Know Erik's Secrets and Don't Want Me to Speak of Them. Who Are You?"

"It's you!" he cried, in a feverish voice. "You, who know Erik's secrets and don't want me to speak of them. Who are you?"

"You know who I am! . . . I am the Persian!"

CHAPTER XIX.

The Viscount and the Persian.

Raoul now remembered that his brother had once shown him that mysterious person, of whom nothing was known except that he was a Persian and that he lived in a little old-fashioned flat in the Rue de Rivoli.

The man with the ebony skin, the eyes of jade and the astrakhan cap bent over Raoul.

"I hope, M. de Chagny," he said, "that you have not betrayed Erik's secret?"

"And why should I hesitate to betray that monster, sir?" Raoul rejoined haughtily, trying to shake off the intruder. "Is he your friend, by any chance?"

"I hope that you said nothing about Erik, sir, because Erik's secret is also Christine Daae's and to talk about one is to talk about the other!"

"Oh, sir," said Raoul, becoming more and more impatient, "you seem to know about many things that interest me; and yet I have no time to listen to you!"

"Once more, M. de Chagny, where are you going so fast?"

"Cannot you guess? To Christine Daae's assistance."

"Then, sir, stay here, for Christine Daae is here!"

"With Erik?"

"How do you know?"

"I was at the performance and no one in the world but Erik could contrive an abduction like that!"

"Oh," he said, with a deep sigh, "I recognized the monster's touch!"

"You know him then?"

The Persian did not reply, but heaved a fresh sigh.

"Sir," said Raoul, "I do not know what your intentions are, but can you do anything to help me? I mean, to help Christine Daae?"

"I think so, M. de Chagny, and that is why I spoke to you."

"What can you do?"